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## LONG-DISTANCE PRICE WARS

### DON'T ALWAYS MEAN SAVINGS FOR CONSUMERS

Montana telephone customers need to be smart shoppers when looking for the best long-distance calling rates.

The state Public Service Commission advises consumers to be aware that the widely publicized rate plans of 5- and 7-cents-per-minute being offered by AT&T, MCI and Sprint also include monthly fees, are for out-of-state calls only, may only be good on certain days or times of day, and are not available everywhere in Montana.

There are savings to be gained for customers whose calling patterns fit the plans' designs. Before signing up for any long-distance calling plan, consumers should understand their calling patterns by knowing:

- whether they make lots of long-distance calls or very few;
- whether they make out-of state calls or intrastate or both;
- and whether they make calls during the day or at night, on weekdays or on weekends.

Consumers who don't make many out-of-state long-distance calls will not save money with these plans because the higher in-state rates combined with the monthly fees add up to more than they would pay with other plans.

In a related issue, the PSC reports it is hearing many complaints from low-volume, non-plan AT&T customers about AT&T's monthly minimum usage fee of \$3 and the company's policy of sending out bills only every three months instead of monthly to customers whose charges total less than \$30 per month. Customers can return to monthly billing upon request by calling AT&T at 1-800-222-0300.

A customer who is dissatisfied with any long-distance carrier's rates or service is free to switch to another carrier, or may choose not to subscribe to a preselected carrier at all.

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